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AUTHOR Whybra, David; Prinzing, Jerg
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ABSTRACT

The decision of a West German English teacher training program to make its own videotapes in the classroom as a replacement for outdated instructional films resulted in heightened student motivation and creativity. Experimental use of the technique in schools produced increased teacher trainee confidence, greater pupil readiness to speak the language, and in individual cases, modifications in pupil character and behavior. The advantages offered by videotape technology and active participant involvement promote substantial gains in language skills and knowledge. As a medium for self-observation, videotaping can be used to reduce anxiety and insecurity; to promote the pragmatic use of language, mimicry, and gestures; and to practice communicative measures such as corroboration, enlarging on a point, provocation, teasing, and expressions of disbelief, incredulity, and annoyance. The many uses of videotape recordings include training, self-observation, observation of others with or without assistance, animation, and videotherapy. Use of videotaping with the initial teacher group began in playing out situations occurring upon landing in England with small groups, but interest in participating drew in additional students, props, and communication among participants and with third parties. Overall, the videotaping was found to be a psychologically stabilizing factor in the class, and has led to other instructional ideas. (MSE)

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VIDEO SEQUENCES AND CREATIVITY IN COMMUNICATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

David Whybra & Jerg Prinzing

In the winter semester of 1980/81 the Department of English at the Hochschule Hildesheim ran a course entitled 'Teaching English'. This course was designed along co-operative lines involving the participation of all the teaching staff and a large group of students. The aim of the course was to set up criteria by which lessons could be professionally observed and judged. The behaviour of pupils and teachers in filmed lessons available at that time on the open market was to provide a basis for developing criteria.

Our team very soon came to the unexpected but unanimous conclusion that the filmed lessons were inappropriate - they had been overtaken by developments in foreign language learning and teaching - and could at most serve as a warning to future teachers. It should be noted, however,

that they had originally been conceived as serious examples of good teaching. Sic transit gloria!

Unfortunately, it was not practicable in terms of staff time and finance to make our own films, so we turned to video. With relatively little effort and at reasonable expense it is possible for amateurs to produce good recorded materials with video and we believed this offered us the chance of achieving our aims. We soon discovered that the further production of conventional model lesson material for teacher training would be much inclined to a theoretical occupation with educational problems. We tended more to practical methodology and to an applied psychology approach. Video seemed to be the ideal medium for our purposes.

We thus began in that course to film our own kernel situations on video with our students and have not looked back since. The video sequences contained interaction in everyday situations. They were intended to further the language ability of the students and at the same time to dovetail into the professional language teacher training involving didactics and methodology. We hoped no less that through observation (meaning self-observation) and subsequent self-awareness we would help the students to modify their language and teaching behaviour within the professional dimension in a fashion conducive to communicative language teaching.

It is our considered opinion that language acquisition for our students in their dual role as learners and future language teachers must be fun and so motivate them for the further steps in their training.
With relatively minimal and simple preparations we have attempted to create different situations which may well occur in the normal run of the lives of the pupils of our future teachers. We laid great emphasis upon spontaneity in our teaching aims but did not automatically expect this of our students. We rather relied on our methodology to create openings for spontaneity, as this methodology could then be passed on among teachers wanting to work communicatively. The improvisation towards which we were thus also consciously working did mean that the

contributions of individual participants were sometimes unavoidably spectacular or inappropriate. On the whole, we considered this to be a positive development, inasmuch as the participants increasingly felt more at ease and were enjoying their work.

We observed that the situations became longer and more complex as the term progressed; sometimes they were extremely funny and at other times a small element of artificiality crept in. They did, however, yield an enormous amount of language production, both of a creative character and of a practical habitualising nature.

The students were quite happy with their "acting" and were additionally motivated when reviewing their performance on the subsequent replay. They were motivated not only to continue this work but to try out new material and vary what they had already done. These first simple steps in producing video sequences to support and further language acquisition served to engender and harness creativity in the language learning process. We were and still are of the opinion that this work cannot be started too soon during the course of studies.

In our partner university, Jordanhill College, Glasgow, foreign language teacher training employs video from the very start, asking students to do some micro-teaching (group size max. 12) in their first course week! Technical perfection is not called for and a minimum of equipment is used.

Wiese also reports "that for learning processes involving the medium of video the technical side need not be perfect" and cites the example of a school in Nienburg on the River Weser (12-14 yrs-old children): "The project named 'Where has the register gone?' revealed the creativity and enjoyment that come to light when children grapple with the medium of video (1)." Boeckmann comments that "the routine employment of communication media in the classroom is extremely important for open teaching (2)" (eds. note: open = not consciously authoritarian-based).

By contrast, an informal survey showed that in the second phase of teacher training (school-based for 1½ years) the medium of video is hardly used at all for the observation and training of foreign language teachers.

We were able, however, to extend our experiments to our student counsellor teachers, to former students, to the participants of national and international congresses and to other teacher training students in the state of Lower Saxony who were unknown to us. The favourable reaction to our research activities and the positive results obtained by other colleagues have encouraged us to continue with our work. We observed especially increased self-confidence on the part of our students when teaching, a higher level of readiness to speak the foreign language on all occasions and, in individual cases, encouraging modifications of character and behaviour.

Video sequences and creativity in communicative foreign language learning

Self-made video recordings which are intended for use as a teaching medium to improve communicative competence in foreign language lessons should today be beginning to play just as important a role as audio-visual courses have been doing for the last 35 years. The great interest shown by children in TV, video and video games will certainly primarily have a favourable influence. Fifteen years ago pop songs took on a similar motivational function in English Language Teaching in German schools and they have now assumed an appropriate position in didactics and taken on an interesting role in methodology.
The replay and freeze facilities can be used for correcting "mistakes", for giving praise, for renewed enjoyment, and, of course, for the variation, extension and perhaps even simplification of the sequences according to need and degree of prowess. Enormous gains in language skills and knowledge are to be obtained through speaking, listening and watching when the participants are actively involved in video work (3). Added to the reward of the action replay, we find that the high absolute participation rate of the pupils and the possible variation of their participation can increase the level of motivation. We speak of reward above because the pupils see themselves on the screen in action and interaction and experience language acquisitional and behavioural reinforcement. The knowledge that "mistakes" can be erased should suf-

fice to avoid inhibition. We work on the premise that no teacher would sink to "blackmailing" the pupils with the video tapes. The modest amount of props required, for instance, tables, chairs, bags, coats, writing materials etc. are on hand in every classroom.
Even the school laws in Lower Saxony support the educative aspect of such self-made productions. Pupils are required in Paragraph 2 of our School Law "to obtain information and learn how to deal with it critically". We may thus see secondary aims in helping the children to resist the manipulative possibilities in programme production and to gain insight into the suggestive, consumption-oriented techniques of commercial television.

Our research was to be bound to everyday reality, having the global aim of furthering communication in everyday situations. We saw openings for this work in school, in adult education and in universities. We estimate that there may also be many gratifying possibilities for working with under-achievers in school.

Several observers have commented that the technical equipment is now already available in a surprisingly high number of schools. It is reliable equipment and very simple to operate. We believe that teachers are not attempting to use video cameras frequently enough to become sure in their handling and thus provide us with recorded material which could be exchanged to mutual advantage. Progress will remain restricted as long as we are not able to mutually criticise and correct our experimental work.

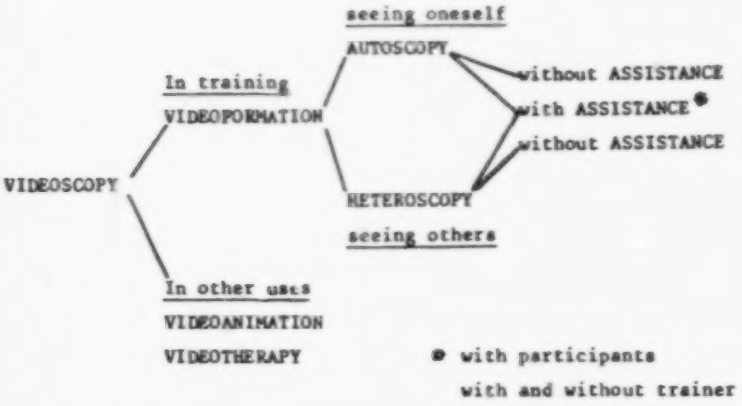
Psychological components

We noted initially the function of video as a medium for observation (self-observation). In contrast to many colleagues in the field of didactics, we are not directly aiming at analysing "lessons" given by and with students participating in this work during their teacher training. "Tear up the balance-sheet of lesson aims" commented H.E. Piepho in 1983 (4). By making self-observation and self-awareness possible, we would like to favour modifications of behaviour which lead to re-

duction of anxiety and insecurity and promote the pragmatic use of language, mimicry and gestures. Those communicative measures which uphold and further the understanding between communicating partners should be practised, for instance, corroboration (not teacher echo), enlarging upon a point, provocation, teasing and even expressions of incredulity, disbelief and annoyance.
We should like to see teachers and student teachers sure in their use of language and in their classroom actions. For pupils it is perhaps the motivational aspect of video work that is most important.

Video as a medium

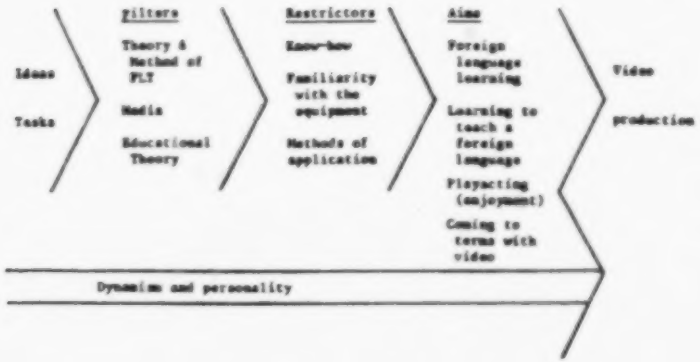
The following diagrammatic representation of video as a medium indicates some of its manifold uses:



Source: ATEE 1982 (5)

Wiese has spoken of the (inter)active video camera in the context of fully realising its potential: "Interaction using the equipment means, with regard to the technical application of video, that the content of recordings may be exchanged as communications between two or more (groups of) addressees. The communications will convey information to

the partners and will invite or provoke an answer or reaction. Video interaction goes beyond the accustomed one-way communication of TV; it can, for example, consist of two groups of children in a class making different statements on the same theme or two groups of students may experiment with divergent teaching approaches and then discuss them. Further developments will go beyond the individual institution or group and will include a medium-oriented correspondence between schools, hopefully across frontiers and language barriers" (6).
Our didactic model takes the following form:



Video sequences in the training of foreign language teachers

Our starting point lay in the playing-out of situations which occur continuously - in one way or another - after landing in an English-speaking country, although not necessarily with that geographical restriction.
It was theoretically clear beforehand that the speech items which are needed in all sorts of (mini-)situations do, in fact, occur in a basi-

cally small group of macro-situations, e.g. At the customs
At the Travel Agency
Waiting in a Queue
At the Bank
At the Restaurant
In the Waiting-room (7).

We began with situations involving a small group of participants, but, after news of our escapades reached other students, we were having to manage groups of thirty! The progressive increase in the number of participating students enabled us to diversify our play-acting activities considerably. People not directly involved at the nuclei of situations, who subsequently became known as "life-savers", were able to broaden the scope of the action spontaneously and introduce fresh, but associated topics with additional lexical items. In the situation "At the Customs", for example, several people would get quite involved if a traveller was being victimised. People pushing in would get a ticking-off, opinions in the waiting-queue would be passed and customs officials chose a very careful path indeed between diplomacy and authority, all the the while calming the impatient members of the queue.

The participants soon generated their own communicative impulses and our fears that students might 'hide' in the group or that individuals might govern the scene were for the most part dispelled. Organisationally we had initially used the technique of employing advanced students to get the ball rolling and we would defend this measure as an acceptable instrument of group dynamics which can soon be regelated to a very minor consideration.

Our experience was similar in other areas, e.g. props and 'distractors'. We had originally taken a lot of trouble to procure prospectuses, office materials, the realia of past trips to Britain and the US and had even 'forged' currency, thus inadvertently conceiving a 'dramaturgy through props! We even brought cabin trunks into the college! It soon transpired that these objects d'art were accepted, but not at all regarded as particularly necessary by the students. They were quite prepared to get along with far less material and with minimal preparation, for instance,

gold and silver medallions, airline timetables to Haiti and Tahiti, mix-ups over names on tickets, lost umbrellas, ambiguous phone calls etc. We were soon able to leave this aspect to the initiative of the students and believe that a similar situation would arise in school. First attempts had, however, shown the necessity of 'life-savers' and 'sheet-anchors'. In case somebody really was at loss for words, we developed language impulses which helped to dodge the issue, throw up a smoke-screen or put an alternative plan into action. The students would thus not need to fall back on to their native tongue (8). We learned to call for 'Miss Jones' and soon a certain 'Mr Stevens' appeared. On the telephone we were able to interject:

- "Excuse me, it's a bad line, could you speak up?"
- "Excuse me, it's a bad line, could you repeat that?"
- "Sorry, I can't hear you, there's a drill outside, can you ring back?"
- "Call me back in an hour, please."

We then discovered that written or printed aids were also of great help in this function:

At the customs: A warning about importing flowering plants and smuggling animals, (rabies etc.)

In the Restaurant: a menu

At the Bank : filling out a form.

Numerous comments, questions, answers, reactions to those questions and answers and fetching third parties for further information enabled a good flow of communication. Our own signs, posters and pictures were a very useful and easily produced orientation.

Conclusion and perspectives

Taking on roles, play-acting and enjoying language activity had thus come to the forefront in our course and (self-)observation had become secondary, although not dispensable. The use of video had become a psychologically stabilising factor. We argue that this factor derives from the wish of the participants to achieve behavioural modification during recording. After recording they are potentially able to confirm themselves their own flexibility and developmental capacity. Video may thus be

used appropriately for the aims in language teacher training which we outlined ab initio. The parallel use of textbook and of pupil-produced video sequences may be envisaged for the future. Comparable productions are viable in adult education (9) as auxiliaries and variables for foreign language acquisition, practice and production. Relevant research at the level of adult learners regarding video sequences and learning English as a lingua franca would be desirable.
Behind the taxonomy of learning that leads to speech acts and communicative competence we see the task-based approach which we define as insight by the learner through his (speech) actions into language competence and performance. The use of video guarantees the possibility of this insight through self-observation. For future language teachers we consider the not so spontaneous possibility of insight to be extremely valuable for the foundation of a professional attitude to communicative foreign language teaching.

The reader is referred to the following Appendix for an illustrative example of video-work in communicative foreign language teaching.

Appendix

The following excerpts from the record of one video sequence, listing functions , lexis, roles and the number of participants may serve as an example of the work involved.

At the Customs

Have you anything to declare, Sir/Madam?
May I have a look at....?
May I see?
What is this?
What is it?
What's that?
Did you buy the .... in ....?
Will you please open/shut the/your case/bag?

Please stand/wait here.
Show me your...., please.
Stop there, please.
Just a moment, please.

You're not allowed to ....
There are no ..... in my case/bag.

Excuse me.
I'm sorry!
It was an accident!
You fool!
I beg your pardon.

I don't know.
I can't explain it.
I don't understand.
It's not mine.
Yes/no, I bought it in ...
It only cost £.....

You are, are you?

I can, can't I?

Roles: travellers, customs men, smugglers, cleaner, pusher-in, immigration officials, policemen.

Production team: three people.

Props: cases, bags, coats, contraband: packets of tea, bottles, cigarette packets. Two people.

Camera: one person.

Sound: one person.

Lenght of sequence: four minutes.

Notes

1) Wiese, J.G. : Video in der Schule, in Videografie 4, 1981, p. 211.
2) Boeckmann, K., lecture: Wie können Medien offenen Unterricht fördern?; 20 gpi-Symposium, 10- 12-3-1982 in Hannover, Theme: "Bildung am Bildschirm".
3) Advantages: Jane Revell has noted the following positive features of using video:
   - immediate applicability (motivation for the usefulness of what one has just learnt)
   - ersatz true-to-life
   - extensive illustration (lecture: Video im Englischunterricht, 23-9-83, Hannover).
4) Piepho, H.E. : in an aside during a lecture, 10 Arbeitstagung der Fremdsprachendidaktiker, Aachen, 9- 12-10-83.
5) Association for Teacher Education in Europe, 51 rue de la Concorde, 1050 Bruxelles (ATEE); Standing Working Group on Audio-Visual methodology in teacher training: "The Training of Teachers in and by the use of Audio-Visual Methods", group paper, 1982.
6) Wiese, J.G., in an abstract of his lecture: Korrelat zum Bildschirm: Die (inter)aktive Videokamera. Versuch einer Übersicht über den Stand der Videoarbeit in Schule und Hochschule, 20. gpi-Symposium, 10- 12-3-82, Hannover, Theme: "Bildung am Bildschirm", Advance publication, p. 106. See also the work and publications of Carol Lorac and Michael Weiss in connection with their project "Cultural

and language Audio Visual Exchange", Brighton Polytechnic, Falmer, Sussex BN 1 9PH, England.

7) Cf. A Ticket to Talking, Kamp Verlag; Table of contents: -Model Dialogue - Language functions; and see: Das VHS Zertifikat Englisch, DVV, 1977, p. 25-35.

8) CF. Eppeneder, Ralf, lecture: Der Stellenwert authentischer, interaktiver Sprache für den Fremdsprachenunterricht, 14. Jahrestagung der GAL, 29.9.- 1.10.83. Duisburg.
Eppeneder does not consider learner activity in this context to be arbitrary and recommends the anticipation of speech acts together with the preparation of their formulation. This precautionary attitude then becomes less pronounced with the progress of the learners.

9) Cf. WELCOME, Hueber Verlag.